

Listen

A Seeker's Resource for Spiritual Direction

J A N U A R Y 2 0 1 5

V O L 9 : I S S U E 1

FINDING STILLNESS IN PARK, REVERSE, OR DRIVE

Apuppy came into my life—I held her at two days of life. Tiny, grunting, button ears, no open eyes. Every Sunday I visited her mother, Angel, and the litter of nine pups. She came home in mid-December 2013, at forty-nine days. Nothing in recent memory prepared me for a white Labrador retriever puppy, simultaneously sassy and calm, integrating into my home with an eight-year-old Chesapeake Bay retriever. The contemplative older dog appeared astonished, looking to me as if to ask, "Excuse me, what?!"

My compassion grows for young mothers and fathers. Awakening from sleep every two and a half hours to take Kula outside to relieve herself, I puttered and stuttered through the dark December days. Then the Alaska cold really arrived. Negative twenty-six degrees Fahrenheit. The pup was in my car several hours a day while I was at work, and I realized an Autostart remote start device would become necessary in order to easily turn the heater on for her. In essence, an Autostart means that I can push a button on my key fob from inside a building or a distance away from my car, and it will start the engine, thus the heater.

The splurge of a purchase was made. On a Thursday, with barely enough time to make my service club lunch, I



Atlantic Puffin — *Fratercula arctica*

clicked the Autostart from my office, walked to the car, took Kula for a quick walk, then buckled in with four minutes remaining to drive around the block for the weekly meeting. I put the car in reverse, pressed the gas petal. Instantaneously the motor shut off, doors clicking to lock. Oops, I had not yet inserted the key into the ignition. Twenty seconds later, turning the key to start, nothing happened. Worse yet, the key became stuck in the ignition, and I couldn't get it out. The engine was off. Doors locked. I was going to be late. Problem solving, I called Safe and Sound, the store where I'd purchased the remote start.

"Hello," I explained. "I got an Autostart, and the key is stuck, and I can't" The calm male voice asked, "Where are you?" I explained, he listened, then calmly said, "Let's start at the beginning. Is your car in park?" Oh my gosh; a dawning realization! I'd initially put the

car into reverse, without the key in the ignition. I began stammering, "I'm so silly, it's in reverse," as I moved the gear shift back to park. "I got it fixed; I'm so sorry." Laughing, he said, "It's always good to start at the beginning and check where you are."

When I drove to lunch, late, I looked at the dashboard and gear choices: Park, Reverse, Neutral, Drive. I wondered how often I am in reverse when I desire to drive, or need to pause in neutral, or park awhile, be still, and ask the valuable question, "Where are you?" The key is to be deliberate, become aware of our automatic responses, make time and opportunity for park, reflect, play. A spiritual director can aid our journey. So too can contemplation upon everyday life circumstances, and with our critter companions. ↗

—Pegge Erkeneff

SEEDS OF INTEREST:

- Field Guide: *Rear View Mirror Meditation*
- Poem: *Inward Journey*
- Poem: *What I Am*
- Book Review: *The Twelve Degrees of Silence*
- Global Resources
- Ask Owl

BOOK REVIEW

The Twelve Degrees of Silence

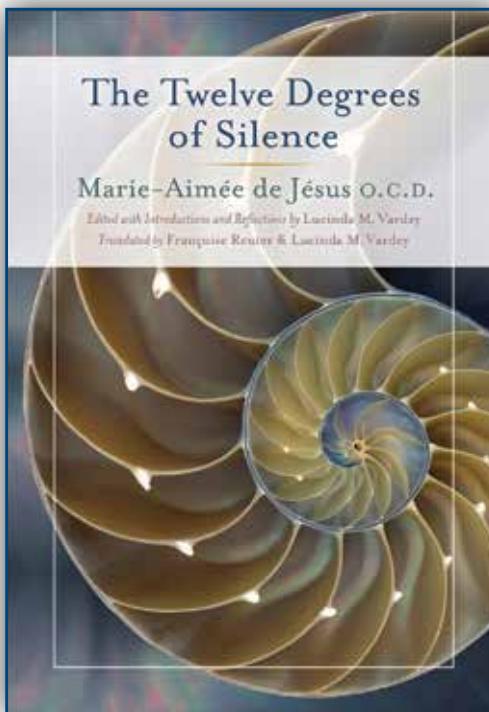
by Marie-Aimée de Jesus OCD, edited with introductions and reflections by Lucinda M. Vardley

Toronto, Ontario: Novalis, 2014

80 pages, CAD\$12.95, USD\$10.95

A slim book, *The Twelve Degrees of Silence* is probing and thoughtful, offering the reader an opportunity and tools to deepen his or her experience of stillness and silence. Lucinda M. Vardley is the author of Mother Teresa's *A Simple Path*, and she provides an excellent introduction, together with clear, concise, guided reflections to break open the writings of Marie-Aimée de Jesus, a nineteenth-century French Carmelite nun, who was inspired by the writings of Saint John of the Cross.

The twelve degrees of silence encompass silence in words, actions, one's imagination, one's memories, with others, with one's heart, to self-interest, the mind, judgments, to the will, towards oneself, and with God. The guided reflection questions Vardley offers in each chapter are reminiscent of an excellent spiritual direction session. Vardley suggests that, "You may wish to concentrate on one degree per month, in order that it can permeate its wisdom as the process delicately unfolds" (35).



Chapter six, "Silence with One's Heart" is a transition chapter for a seeker who is advancing in his or her spirituality, and beginning to understand, "A silent heart is a pure heart: a melody singing in the heart of God" (51). Vardley writes, "In the preceding degrees (#1 to #5), silence was a cry of the Earth. In this degree (#6), the soul, in her purity, learns the first note of the sacred song, the song of the heavens" (51). "With the tongue mute, the senses calm, one's imagination, memories and other things all brought to silence, comes solitude" (50). Although this book's foundation is essentially contemplative and Christian with its references and classical understanding of the stages of the spiritual journey, the brilliant guided reflection questions are universal, and ultimately echo, "Let silence determine the right outcome" (61).

Living in a world that seemingly

becomes nosier and more fragmented, cultivating interior peace and stillness through short spots of time is important. Vardley offers an excellent resource for spiritual directees and spiritual directors, small groups, retreat settings, and individuals who desire a more intimate life with God, others, and self.

G L O B A L R E S O U R C E S : *Supporting Your Spiritual Journey*

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FIELD GUIDE

REAR VIEW MIRROR MEDITATION

Set aside a half an hour or more, have paper and pen, or a writing device nearby.

Breathe deeply for five or more minutes. Feel into your physical self. In your body, where are you tense? Spacious? Flexible? Are there spots of bliss or resistance? Simply notice any sensations without judgment or analysis.

SHIFT

Allow your attention to travel your life timeline. Recall age five, or the youngest age you remember. What energies, sensations, or memories surface? For what are you thankful, grateful, and least grateful? Acknowledge without judgment, and move on...

CRUISE

Recall age ten...
Recall age fifteen...
Recall age twenty...
Pause for a minute, and fast track into present time, on this present date. Acknowledge the road you've traveled, together with any consistencies and incongruities.
Now, recall age twenty-five...

Recall age thirty...

Recall age forty...

Continue to your present age (or stop if you've already reached it!)

TUNE INTO YOUR BIRTHDAY AGE, THIS YEAR

Pause to idle in the present time: what reveals itself to you about here and now, the life you live, the silence you do—or don't—cultivate, the kindness you embrace and share, and life blessings for which you give thanks?

REFLECT ON THE YEAR AHEAD

Choose one aspect of your life to tend to with care and compassion. Be willing to give permission to fine tune the necessary actions and changes to involve all the best parts of yourself to engage and shift into gear. Who and which activities fuel your creativity, compassion, kindness? Can you create a roadmap?

STOP

In your own words, on paper or in the silence of your mind and heart, give thanks for life in all of its beauty, complexity, and simplicity. Then, park all your thoughts, and simply attend to the present moment.

KEY

The next time you meet with your spiritual guide or companion, give permission for this reflection to become part of your exploration and inquiry together.

Listen

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Listen is an outreach publication of Spiritual Directors International. When you visit the SDI website at www.sdiworld.org, you can learn about retreats, programs, conferences, and other educational events related to spiritual companionship. You can read descriptions of the spiritual direction relationship from a variety of spiritual traditions,

and discover excellent questions to ask yourself and any potential spiritual directors you choose to interview. To locate a spiritual director or guide, go online to *Seek and Find Guide: A Worldwide Resource of Available Spiritual Directors*. More than 5,000 spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at www.sdiworld.org.



What I Am

what i am is not
the imaginary me
who lives beyond
the pain who is there
but never here who
is not frightened
who is not broken or
stupid who is always
to be preferred who
will go to heaven
without this me
here now feeling
broken and stupid
feeling fear at the
nakedness of being
known feeling so
tenderly so tenuously
alive

—Brad Byrum [California, USA]



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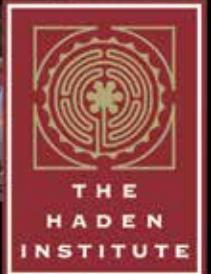
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Inward Journey

Gazing into a clear lake,
past glimmering waters' mirrored scenes,
past memories, plans, idle thoughts
scattering like fish that swim and flit,
I seek the living stillness
in a caverned pool of quiet
deep within
where soul dwells
and G-d waits.

Gazing into the clear space
of sunlit sky, past drifting clouds
or swooping birds, past all enticing,
I fall through the sky to the deep within,
seeking the silent heartbeat
of the hidden holy place
in the quiet
where soul dwells
and G-d waits.

I hear the Holy singing, sounding
in Silence, clear and pure.
I wait
 for a Word to rise
 from the Stillness and the Silence,
I stay
 silent and still with longing
 for the touch of the Holy,
in the secret place
where G-d waits
to be found.

—Linda Robinson [Pennsylvania, USA]



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ASK OWL



Question: Is spiritual direction a place where I can bring up sexuality or gender-identity questions?

Hoot Hoot: Yes, absolutely. There are no off-limit

topics in spiritual direction. The fullness of our identity with physical, psychological, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects of our being deserves a safe and sacred place to be explored. Integration of our unique distinctiveness and our relationship with God or the Sacred is the primary focus in spiritual companioning. Meeting with a spiritual director can be an excellent place to converse, pray, and integrate our sexuality and expression of intimacy whether that means we are heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or transgender. Every human person deserves the opportunity to be listened to, heard, and seen. Spiritual direction offers a time and place to know oneself in our own inner world, in relationship with others, and in an intimate, spiritual love affair with God. Whether we are grieving a perceived way of being in the world, the loss of the familiar, or if we are experiencing fear or joy, all expressions of our life can be brought to spiritual guidance.

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail Listen@sdiworld.org.



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—Translated by Marta Rios and Xavier Ortiz Monasterio

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